

since the days of Domitian. There had been spasmodic outbreaks of fierce persecution under Decius, — " that execrable beast," as Lactantius calls him, — under Valerian, and under Aurelian. But Aurelian's reign was short and he had been too busy fighting to spare much time for religious persecution. The tempest quickly blew over. For fully half a century, with brief interludes of terror, the Church had been gathering strength and boldness.

The policy of the State towards it was one of indifference. Gallienus, indeed, the worthless son of Valerian, had issued edicts of toleration, which might be considered cancelled by the later edicts of Aurelian or might not. If the State wished to be savage, it could invoke the one set; if to be mild, it could invoke the other. There was, therefore, no absolute security for the Church, but the general feeling was one of confidence. The army contained a large number of Christians, of all ranks and conditions, officers, centurions, and private soldiers. Many of the officials of the civil service were Christians. The court and the palace were full of them. Diocletian's wife, Prisca, was a Christian ; so was Valeria, his daughter. So, too, were many of his chamberlains, secretaries, and eunuchs. If Christianity had been a proscribed religion, if the Christians had anticipated another storm, is it conceivable that they would have dared to erect at Nicomedia, within full view of the palace windows, a large church situated upon an eminence in the centre of the city, and evidently one of its most conspicuous structures ? No, Christianity in the East felt tolerably safe and was